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# Religion and Intercultural Communication Competence

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## Abstract

The rush of international students has been increasing day by day in Malaysia. Religion is not a personal affair there and the foreigners are treated based on their religion. Several studies suggest to address religion in this regard. The aim of this study is to examine whether religion is having association with the intercultural communication competence (ICC) in Malaysian context. Literature has explored that religiosity has not been given attention by the researchers in the previous studies regarding the contributors of ICC. Although, religion is one of the crucial element behind every intercultural communication. Scholarships regarding the religiosity in terms of ICC would be fruitful for documenting the current situation of international students in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Religion, Religiosity, ICC.

## 1. Introduction

Researchers from several theoretical grounds have been conferring for that word Intercultural communication competence (ICC) and finally built “an unwieldy collection of terminologies” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989) extending from global citizenship, cultural sensitivity, transcultural communication appropriateness, intercultural communication effectiveness to cross-cultural adjustment (Taylor, 1994). Fantini (2005) provides one description about ICC as “the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (p. 1). In Deardorff (2006) investigation, whose statistics were composed from intercultural researchers from side to side the Delphi study, the popular description from between nine descriptions of intercultural competence be there “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 247-248).

Culture of Malaysia is chiefly inclined by the culture of Asian countries besides the religion Islam (Mahmud, Amat, Rahman, & Ishak, 2010). A study about the antecedents of intercultural effectiveness by Mamman (1995) mentioned that a foreigner can share the similar religion with the host but they are totally different in their cultural upbringings and it is having a positive relation with intercultural interaction. Additionally, the importance of the religion in intercultural competence is dependent on the category of religion, the individual’s religiosity along with the stereotypes apprehended by the individuals. Furthermore, in the West, an individual may be discovered that his/her religion might not considerably have emotional impact on his/her intercultural competence. However, in Malaysia, Islam is the principal statement of belief, religion is not considered as a ‘personal matter’ (Mamman, 1995).

Malaysia is having a big number of students from Indonesia, Iran, China, Yamen, Libya, and Arab Saudi (Yusoff, 2011). Majority of these countries except China are the Muslim states. Couple of studies demonstrated that religion, culture and communication are the concerns of international students of Malaysia (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010; Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Mahmud et al., 2010; Slethaug & Manjula, 2012). Thus, in the Islamic states a foreigner could find that his/her religion significantly affects his/her intercultural competence (Mamman, 1995)

## Problem Statement

Malaysia is having a great diversity of international students in their universities about their higher education. Rendering to the Ministry of Higher Education, it is aimed to host 0.2 million international students from all over the world for Malaysia (Chi, 2011). Culture, cultural differences, communication, religion and so many problems encountered by the international students when they started their education in Malaysia (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010; Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Slethaug & Manjula, 2012). Majority of the international students come from the Islamic states where the dominant religion is Islam (Yusoff, 2011). Mamman (1995) states that foreigner’s religion is having a significant effect with the intercultural competence in Malaysia. So, it depicts that the individual is having same religion would be competent in intercultural interactions.

Religion is the important factor that has been given little attention by researchers of intercultural competence. Wrench, Corrigan, McCroskey, and Punyanunt-Carter (2006) mentions that religion works as a vital factor of intercultural communication and it is an area that needs further research. Similarly, Ameli and Molaei (2012) demonstrates that religion directly influence the intensity of intercultural communication between

the individuals. In a same manner, Holmes and O'Neill (2012) examines the developing along with evaluating intercultural competence among students and recommends religion have strong impact in the perspective of intercultural competence and needs further investigation. It proves that there is proportion of religion in intercultural competence perspective which needs further investigation.

Although, the researches have been done in the past regarding religion and strongly recommends to addresses religion in further studies (Ameli & Molaei, 2012; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Wrench et al., 2006). Despite the fact, it is still considered as a gap in different cultural context in frame work of intercultural competence. Because, these mentioned studies have been done in a qualitative manner and it needs an empirical investigation to test its relationship with intercultural competence. In this research, religiosity is treated as the role of religion in intercultural competence.

## Research Objective

To determine the relationship between religiosity and intercultural communication competence ICC.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Intercultural Communication Competence

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) state intercultural competence like performance which requires to be effective in addition to appropriate. Appropriate conduct infers the instructions besides standards of different person must be assumed along with appreciated (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Steinberg (2007) enhances that it is not a normal thing to be a competent communicator, on the other hand like the extra ability, that could be learned. Competent communicators among the people, it is obligatory they must be interested, besides having aspiration to obtain this essential understanding plus expertise (Gudykunst, 2002).

The expectation of intercultural competence is that the individual's must can communicate with the culturally different people. Additionally, it also requires from them to have multiple identities and keeping their individuality at the same time (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). The competency is basically about the skill in order to interact efficiently to the individuals having different cultural backgrounds besides achieve errands in their cultures otherwise to the culturally diverse individuals (Moran & Lu, 2001). Consequently, it have need of individuals to be capable to aspect at themselves from a diverse perception, and evaluate their own activities, importance and opinions like an stranger (Byram & Zarate, 1996).

As has previously been stated, effectiveness and appropriateness forms the central conception of intercultural communication competence (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Deardorff, 2006; Spitzberg, 2000; Vulpe, Kealey, Protheroe, & MacDonald, 2001; Wiseman & Koester, 1993). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) defines effectiveness as "the accomplishment of valued goals or rewards relative to costs and alternatives" (p. 380). Wiseman and Koester (1993) defines appropriateness as "what is regarded as proper and suitable in each situation within a particular culture" (p. 6). After the mentioned conceptions, an intercultural conversationalist must have a conscious of definite characters so that perform for that reason and touch the situational objectives.

Effective communication or conduct is basically a skill in order to attain individual's aims by simply exploiting and administering other's domain (Wiseman, 2002). The behavior in intercultural communication competence requires appropriateness as well as effectiveness, the aspiration of attaining the individual aim could not create any harm/problem to the other: the aspirational aims requires to be fulfilled with relation to costs and alternative (Spitzberg, 1997; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Even though there are numerous researches which have been done in the past to investigate intercultural communication competence. In spite of having a literature, there are some researchers who have empirically tested the relationship among different variables. Riley, Bustamante, and Edmonson (2016) focus on the student engagement to organize students to communicate appropriately and effectively in a culturally dissimilar world. Ni, Wang, and De la Flor (2015) examined intercultural communication competence (ICC) at individual level denoted by open-mindedness, cultural empathy and flexibility forecasts public relations practices. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) provide another research as an illustration to research ICC in culture general perspective. After analysis five variables were appeared, motivation, ability to listen, experience in intercultural communication, positive attitude towards the people from other cultures and empathy with the individuals that belong from different values.

### 2.2 Religion

Religion is described a combination of principles, deeds, and ethical assertions, frequently classified for example devotions, services, in addition religious regulations, all of which are collective within cultures. Religion explains about the external God to the individuals besides frequently commands actions, just like situation about Ten Commandments of the Christian belief (Reisinger & Crotts, 2009). Religious principles are vigorous to a culture.

Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2015) complements that culture usually reflect the effect of

religion in its every sphere like communication patterns from the time when it helps so numerous basic purposes. These purposes comprise social controller; clash tenacity; strengthening of group unity; descriptions of the unexplainable and emotive backing. These purposes both deliberately and instinctively influence on facets of individuals extending from professional practices to political affairs, to person's conduct. Religion is perceived such as the commanding also prevalent component of culture that influences which means individuals would lead their lives.

### *2.3 Religiosity*

Religiosity otherwise faithfulness, is the "degree of one's connection or acceptance of their religious institution, participation in church attendance and activities, as well as one's regard for the leaders or the religion and church" (Alston, 1975). Allport (1954) suggests two features of religiosity, extrinsic besides intrinsic. Intrinsic religiosity is in what way spiritual principles effect a person's opinions, morals and intentions. Extrinsic religiosity is by what means a person deed out their religion in addition to how their everyday life benefits from the religion. People having advanced intrinsic religiosity are extra expected to take lesser proportions of prejudgment; although individuals with greater proportion of extrinsic religiosity are additional probable to take advanced levels of prejudgment (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Religion is one of the main persuasive power in social life. Investigation into the psychology of religion has grown up in current era (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). There are numerous religions, and ancient, demographic, disposition, and cultural influences can have emotional impact the level of the religious trust of any specified clutch or culture. The level of religiosity may fluctuate from culture to culture, also religiosity might have a dissimilar sense, character, and impression in Christian as well as Muslim cultures. Additionally, the title role of religion is very dissimilar in the Nonwestern than in the Western sphere (Abdel-Khalek, 2013).

When one person is certain describe someone as religious may be entirely different from another person's understanding. This happens because of the interaction between religion, traditions and cultures (Hood Jr, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). In literature, rather than focusing on the concept of religion, researchers concentrate on the concept of religiosity because it reflects how an individual adopts such a religion, which intersects with behavior. Studies have demonstrated that individuals' levels of religiosity have discernible effects on attitudes and behaviors (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990; Weaver & Agle, 2002).

A study conducted by Ameli and Molaei (2012) focused on the intercultural communication and religion that are having strong influence on the communication competence among two different sects. Which results, these sects were found of highlighting their similarities rather than their dissimilarities. Simultaneously, religion can affect the intensity of intercultural sensitivity which further leads to the communication competence.

In a same manner, a different sort of research about the expansion as well as evaluation of intercultural competence in the presence of ethnography (Holmes & O'Neill, 2012). And demands for the line of researches to be focused on the religious identities and the position of faith of the individuals have impact on intercultural competence.

Wrench et al. (2006) mentions that religion as a vital factor of intercultural communication and it is the area which is still ready for the research works, further suggests for new scholars to empirically examine religion and intercultural communication competence.

Surprisingly, previous line of researches have not focused on the religiosity of the individuals during their intercultural interactions. These researches only concentrated on the all the contributors that contribute to the ICC. The problem behind that crucial element which is still missing in the previous researches is that these scholarships have been done in western context. The utility of religiosity with the other contributors of ICC is very hard to find in a non-western setting like in Malaysia.

### **3. Discussion**

Majority of the researchers focused on the conceptualization of ICC and very few among them empirically examined the relationship of variables with ICC. While trusting on the literature, it is noticed that very few empirical models of ICC has been developed and addressed so far in the West (Arasaratnam, 2006; Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2007, 2011; Arasaratnam, Banerjee, & Dembek, 2010a, 2010b). These models are claimed to be the culture general models of ICC. It is very hard to find such models which are developed or addressed in the non-western setting especially in Malaysia. Thus, it is itself a knowledge gap that there are very few models and their testing have been done in the western setting.

Secondly, countries like Malaysia where dominant creed of religion is Islam and people are treated according to the teachings of Islam like sisters and brothers (Mamman, 1995). Where majority of the international students came from the Islamic states and having the same religion (Yusoff, 2011). It is recommended to refine these models and address it into different cultures by adding variables in it (Arasaratnam, 2006; Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2007, 2011; Arasaratnam et al., 2010a, 2010b). Additionally, religion is the

portion which is overlooked or not noticed by the researchers of ICC. Several studies recommended to address religion in intercultural competence (Ameli & Molaei, 2012; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Wrench et al., 2006).

#### 4. Conclusion

Religiosity along with the other predictors of ICC could be tested among the different countries of the world. Where the individuals are having the same religion and it is the vital force behind every interaction among the individuals. Although, in the West intercultural competence might not be affected with the religion of foreigner but in the Malaysia and Middle East it is affected by religion (Mamman, 1995). This research offers the refinement of recent researches on intercultural competence in the aspect of religiosity. It also suggests an understanding of competency among international students' population in Malaysia. The aim of Malaysia is to host maximum number of students from the different zones of the world (Chi, 2011). So, a study regarding the religiosity will let the policy makers to know level of competency of international students when dealing with the Malaysians. At last, research in this context will enrich the literature of intercultural competence in the context of Malaysia.

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